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Birthday Theology: A Reflection on Thomas Merton and the Bermuda Menage

Robert E. Daggy

Bermuda is the place in the world most like the South of France. It is, hear me, splendid.

—Thomas Merton to Robert Lax, April 1939

That beautiful island [Bermuda] fed me with more poisons than I have a mind to stop and count.

—Thomas Merton, original draft of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 1946

Thomas Merton was born in France and died in Thailand. He was slightly more than a month away from his twenty-seventh birthday when he entered the Abbey of Gethsemani in Nelson County, Kentucky on 10 December 1941, and he died on 10 December 1968, twenty-seven years to the day later. He spent a smidgen over half his life as a resident of the state of Kentucky. Though we may not think of him as a Kentuckian, and certainly not as a regional writer, it was in Kentucky that he rehearsed the geography of his spiritual and physical journeys, and it was in Kentucky that he attempted to ford the mighty stream of his consciousness to the side of healing and perspective.

He was allowed in 1965 to retire, more or less, to the hermitage where he was to live for the last three years of his life. There, surrounded by Kentucky woods and knobs, in "the primordial lostness of night, solitude, forest, peace," his thoughts spun with incredible lambency through memories, personal and universal, as he sought to embrace and absorb within himself the experience of humankind.¹ He sought within himself the meaning of his own "lost childhood" as well as the meaning of a more generic and redemptive childhood, to find in the peculiar reality of child-ness a clue to the mystery of life's geography and journey. He wrote in 1966: "We with the gentle liturgy / Of shy children have permitted God / To make again His first world."² Anthony T. Padovano has pointed out: "His lost childhood was the object of his yearning, a childhood richly revealed in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, symbolically relived in *The Geography of Lograire*. His long

pilgrimage for a home to settle him was also a journey back to the home he never had as a child."³

Images of home redound in Merton's later writings as he continues his journey, a journey indeed traveled almost entirely in Kentucky's hills, the location which brought him closest to a home of his own. He became more interested in his remaining family, particularly his father's family. His "Aunt Kit" (Agnes Gertrude Stonehewer Merton) visited him at Gethsemani in the early 1960s, and her visit piqued his interest in his Welsh heritage.⁴ In the prologue to *The Geography of Lograire*, a paean to Wales, he called himself (perhaps everyone) "another child of Wales," lamenting the "gone old stone home."⁵ Yet "home" and its quest was no longer a matter of definite place, of specific geography. In 1964, his thoughts swept halfway around the globe, and he called New Zealand, where he had never been, "a kind of homeland in a way."⁶ Places he had been called to him: "Paris has kept reaching out and grabbing hold of me in London, in Cambridge, in Rome, in New York, and in this monastery lost in Kentucky."⁷ Place names haunted him: Rye, St. Antonin, "Miss Maud's house near the village the name of which I have forgotten," the Tarn bridge, Ealing, Douglaston, and he confided: "There are times when I am mortally homesick for the South of France, where I was born."⁸

As he attempted to synthesize his past, he was able to approach catharsis and reconciliation, to understand and to deal with the pain and *angst* of his growing up. He was able in the late 1960s to resume contact with family members from whom he had been withdrawn or alienated since entering the monastery: with his New Zealand aunts, with his British guardian's widow, with his American uncle and his wife. He wrote to his aunt Elsie Hauck Jenkins, in 1965: "I think often of you and Harold [his uncle] and the family."⁹ He wrote to another aunt, Gwynned Merton Trier: "I often think of the old days, and Fairlawn and all the other places where we spent holidays, particularly Rye."¹⁰ Contact with Iris Weiss Bennett, his guardian's widow, launched him into a search to locate, and he hoped to collect, his father's surviving paintings, and he regretted that he had "never got down to doing anything about it."¹¹

Images of family, home, and childhood flood through Merton's later writings and letters, particularly in the late poetry, *Cables to the Ace*, *The Geography of Lograire*, and the recently published "Nurse Poems," *Eighteen Poems*. Symbolically and semiotically, he

passed again through his own experience, often translating it into universal terms.

I am Christ's lost cell
His childhood & desert age
His descent into hell.¹²

He became concerned with the newness, the re-creation, that each birth, each birthday, represented. In *Cables to the Ace* he wrote: "Another sunny birthday. I am tormented by poetry and loss."¹³ Each birthday, every new person, was at once unique and universal. In "Untitled Poem" he developed this theme:

All theology is a kind of birthday
Each one who is born
Comes into the world as a question
For which old answers
Are not sufficient.

He concludes the poem:

So all theology
Is a kind of birthday
A way home to where we are.¹⁴

In Merton's meanderings and musings through his childhood, though we get hints and some details, he chose, either because he could not or would not or because he found it unnecessary, *not* to chronicle fully the complex of events and people which I have called "The Bermuda Menage." This complex stretched over a five-year period from his mother's death in October 1921 until the autumn of 1926, when the situation reached an uneasy and inconclusive denouement. We now possess much greater outside documentation about this period which gives credence to Merton's own assertions about his "lost childhood." It was certainly, as we shall see, an unsettling, rootless, jarring, and confusing period. These outside sources reveal even more how staggeringly so it was. In speaking of the Bermuda menage, Mary Jo Weaver has said: "What this Freudian paradise . . . did to the young Thomas

Merton strains the imagination."¹⁵ This reflection is an attempt to outline the details of the menage, to discover those "poisons" of which he spoke, so that we may have a better picture of what it did to the young Merton.

Ruth Jenkins Merton died 3 October 1921 at the age of thirty-four. Her death, mostly because of the way in which she chose to tell her elder son about it, was a shattering experience for him.¹⁶ For some time before her death, the Merton family—Owen, Ruth, Tom, and John Paul—had been more or less dependent upon her relatively affluent parents, Sam and Martha Jenkins (whom young Tom called "Pop" and "Bonnemaman"). Her death left Owen and his young sons dependent in even more ways, mostly because his desire to paint, described as tantamount to "monomania," prevented his making more than a meagre and erratic livelihood and precluded, apparently, his development of paternal skills. The next few years were to be a harrowing in earnest for his older son, one which left him rawly scarred for years. The younger son, John Paul, was left with the maternal grandparents and did not experience the turmoil and perturbation of those next five years in the exquisite way which his brother did.

Sometime after Ruth Merton's death, or possibly even before it, Owen met Evelyn Scott and her common-law husband, Cyril Kay Scott. Her real name was Elsie Dunn, and his was Frederick Creighton Wellman. They were, as Thomas Merton tells us without ever using their names, "literary people and artists," both having published their first novels in 1921. They had a son, Creighton, who was the same age as Tom.¹⁷ They were among that coterie of real and fancied literary types who wafted through New York and Europe in the 1920s. Evelyn became a fairly respected (though later quickly forgotten) novelist, "one toward whom the arbiters of advanced taste, Sinclair Lewis, Dreiser and Mencken, looked favorably."¹⁸ She knew and corresponded with many of the figures who have come to bespeak the period: Emma Goldman, Kay Boyle, Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys, and Lola Ridge. She had affairs with the poet William Carlos Williams, the critic Waldo Frank, the screenwriter Dudley Nichols, as well as the painter Owen Merton. Kay Boyle said: "One was aware at every instant of the nervous complexities of Evelyn's marital, and sexual, and professional lives."¹⁹ Yet she seems to have been, not so much lickerish, as simply unable to exist without a man or more than one man in attendance upon her. Harry Salpeter described her as

"a small, slight, restless-bodied woman, who appears fragile but has the inclinations of an explorer. Her wide, startled eyes, 'lightning blue,' her fine thick wavy brown hair, and her wide mobile mouth make her a striking person."²⁰

The circumstances of Owen's meeting the Scotts remains vague, but they had certainly more than met by the end of 1921 when Evelyn wrote from Bermuda to the New Zealand poet Lola Ridge:

Say, dearest, I almost forgot, another lost soul we are sending to you. A little man called Owen Merton, about thirty I should judge, a Scotch-Welshman from New Zealand who had been for the last year living in Flushing where his wife recently died and left him with two children. He is very hard up, very naive and genuine, as obscene as Bill Williams [William Carlos Williams], and in all respects an interesting child with real if not stupendous talent. He had been working fiendishly hard at watercolour and some of his things are very successful. He is poor as the rest of us and has been trying to eke it out with landscape gardening.²¹

The reference to landscape gardening may be the clue to their meeting, for the Scotts were being patronized by millionairess Marie Garland (with whom Cyril had an affair) and her husband Swinburne Hale (with whom Evelyn *may* have had an affair). The Garland-Hales resided at Buzzard's Bay in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and we shall hear more of that establishment further on. The Scotts received an allowance from the "Garland Fund," had lived at Buzzard's Bay for a time (where Cyril "managed" the estate), and had, by 1921, moved into a dilapidated mansion which Hale had bought in Somerset, Bermuda. This latter move may have been necessitated by Marie Garland-Hale's increasing antipathy toward Evelyn. Owen Merton may have been doing some landscaping at Buzzard's Bay (he certainly did later) and may have met them there. He may even have gone to Bermuda initially to help Cyril renovate the Hale mansion.

In any case, Owen Merton quickly became friendly with the Scotts. In August 1922 he was painting at Provincetown, where his sister "Ka," who was visiting from New Zealand, and Tom were with him. Writing to Evelyn Scott he comments, "I owe you & Scott so much and I shall always date a great change in my life from the time I met you."²³ A great change was about to be

wrought in Tom Merton's life by exposure to Evelyn Scott and her menage, for Owen Merton decided to leave for Bermuda for an indefinite period. He and Tom sailed on the H.M.S. *Calcutta* on 19 October 1922. Tom was seven and a half years old.

Evelyn Scott was, by all accounts, hardly an easy person. She appears to have been nervous, even hypertense, blunt, opinionated, domineering. Contact with her could become so bruising that many of her one-time friends and lovers never mentioned her again. William Carlos Williams and Waldo Frank failed to mention her in their memoirs, and Cyril Scott omitted any mention of Owen Merton from his autobiography, *Life is Too Short*. Even her father stopped answering her letters in 1926. Her son, Creighton, left a scathing picture of her in his unpublished autobiography, *Confessions of an American Boy*; by the time he wrote it, he had been completely alienated from his mother for years.

One of Evelyn's irritating habits, among apparently so many irritating habits, was to give people nicknames—not always very flattering ones. This may have been, as her son was to claim, part of her desire to remake the world in her own image. She called Cyril Scott "Sug," a shortened form of "sugar," and her son Creighton "Jigeroo," or simply "Jig." The former is surely a comment, possibly sarcastic, on the sweetness which most observed was part of Cyril's personality. The latter developed in Brazil when baby Creighton had to suffer de-lousing, or "chiggering," on several occasions.²⁴ Kay Boyle commented: "Each meal we had, in modest restaurants, was taken over by her young son's loud and steady hiccoughing. Evelyn would accuse him of doing this in order to disrupt all conversation, and perhaps it was true, but it seemed to me quite a normal retaliation for having been given the name of Jigeroo."²⁵ Evelyn sneeringly called William Carlos Williams "Buffalo Bill" and eventually dubbed Owen Merton "Mutt," a name which undoubtedly reflected her patronizing and matronizing feelings toward him. We have no evidence that she tried to grant Thomas Merton the favor of a nickname during the brief time in which they shared the same house. One can almost picture the young Merton reminding her with childish stridency, if in fact she tried to call him something else, that his name was *Tom*. She seems never to have called him anything else, but she did underline Tom on occasion in her letters, and, given what we know of her personality, she may have

driven her point by emphasizing "Tom." It may even, in view of her harpyesque jealousy of his dead mother, have been a comment on the fact that Ruth Merton had insisted he be named and called "Tom."

Just when Owen Merton entered Evelyn Scott's bed as her lover is unclear, but his attitude had been doglike toward her, and one must admit toward Cyril Scott, from the beginning. Certainly Evelyn treated him condescendingly. Owen wrote to Lola Ridge after a month in Bermuda: "Evelyn is being so perfectly sweet—even if I am merely a slightly older Jigeroo to her."²⁶ She referred to the elder Merton as weak, impressionable, naive, childish, helpless, and wrote to Ridge in 1925: "I always felt this terrific maternal passion for him."²⁷ She also found Owen unstable. She confided to Ridge: "The reason I have been afraid is that I recalled the kind of brutal insanity which possessed him after Ruth's death, and I was afraid that trouble would, as it has, drive him to the same state again."²⁸ We gain even more insights from her thinly fictionalized description of their relationship in her novel *Eva Gay*, published in 1933, two years after Owen Merton's death.

In the novel Evelyn Scott is, of course, Eva; Owen Merton is Evan Garrett; and Ruth Merton is Louise. Eva's attitude toward Evan is, as was Evelyn's toward Owen, maternal, pulingly loving at times, contemptuous, and nasty. Through Eva, Evelyn sneers at Evan/Owen, derides his mother as "Old Cripple-Back" (a reference to Gertrude Merton's wearing leg braces as the result of childhood polio), hints at homosexual experience (Evelyn seems to have found the accusation of homosexuality an effective weapon against men whom she did not like or wanted to hurt), and turns his courtship and marriage with Louise/Ruth into a period of indecisive and numbing dreariness. Significantly, the first child (product in Evelyn's imagination of a "have-to marriage"), the child who would have been Tom, conveniently dies. Evan/Owen is crude, brutal, inexplicable, erratic, unpredictable, and he verges on insanity in her depiction of their final break-up.²⁹ Evelyn's portrait of Owen Merton, even given the fact that it was written years after the affair, and that it may have been written with steadily festering bitterness, nonetheless shows us a man who was at odds with himself and whose approach to life was fumbling, at best.

In 1922, Owen fumbled to Bermuda with Tom in tow. He did not immediately introduce Tom into the menage at Ely Mansions.

Swinburne Hale's estate. He left him for a time, *alone*, at a boarding house on the other side of the island. Eventually, however, he brought Tom to live with him and the Scotts. The milieu is hard to imagine: Evelyn, her common-law husband, their son, her lover, and his son. Creighton Scott was later to say that the situation "created one of the nastiest menages a trois."³⁰ In fact, it is from Creighton Scott rather than from Thomas Merton that we get some of our clearest glimpses of the menage in Bermuda. It is important to remember, though, that Creighton wrote this years later, after his feelings toward his mother had settled into an uncompromising detestation.

One may imagine, without understanding it, the plight of a boy bereaved of a mother whom he loved; whose father became entangled with someone else's mother, like mine. The menage a trois is unnatural and repugnant, and my mother made it far worse in his eyes than it would otherwise have been by arrogating to herself motherly duties she had no right to assume. Tom was punished by her, not by his father, who stood aside from disciplinary things when my mother was handy. . . . Since she lived by a logic deliberately intended to be different from that of every body else, it must have seemed capricious and cruel; and I have never been at all certain that cruelty and caprice did not enter into what she did, the fact that she always had explicit reasons for everything being somewhat irrelevant. Tom used to grind his teeth in bed, "British tooth-gritting" his father used to call it, half-jokingly; and as far as I can remember, it was always because of what my mother did to him or forced him to do.

The fact is that Tom's own mother, apart from being dead, was an unsubstantial phantasm in her eyes, that had never existed or should not have existed. I can remember his being punished for crying—it may have been over his bereavement for all that any of the rest of us knew—for losing his appetite, for being late to meals, and an indefinite number of things that other children are reprimanded for but no more. What must have made it insufferable to him is that when I did the same things I got off scott free. . . . Quite apart from the actual deeds, there is something bestial, I think, in usurping the position of a dead mother by force majeure, over the anguished protests of the child, and

punishing him for not liking it. She used to have tantrums behind his back, too, and I remember her screaming at [Owen] Merton, "I'm sick of his damned mother. Sick of her, sick of her, sick of her! I hate her, hate her, hate her, do you hear?" That was what mattered, not what Tom felt. This was a woman who sneered at jealousy and despised it as infantile. . . . In my late twenties, when she and I were still on speaking terms, her reminiscences about Tom's "badness" and intractability were all accompanied by little unctuous giggles, like that of a schoolgirl using a dirty word for the first time.³¹

The situation must have been nearly intolerable for the young Merton. He gave himself his fullest reaction to the Bermuda menage in the original draft of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, cryptically saying, "That beautiful island fed me with more poisons than I have a mind to stop and count." As he first wrote his autobiography, this line began one of the longest digressions in the manuscript, a lengthy essay on what parents do to children without exactly meaning to do it to them. When the publishers demanded that Merton cut and tighten his first draft, the following section was one he chose to delete. It contains his fullest statement, albeit expressed in oblique and general terms, of what *he* thought happened to him in Bermuda.

And now I sit here and try to penetrate the mystery of my equanimity as a child: the uncritical equanimity with which I absorbed the whole earth and the sea and the sky and heaven and hell into my precocious mind without even thinking of it, without ever being able to realize what was getting into me. . . .

What a terrible thing is the plasticity and gentleness of the mind of a child! How quickly it takes on shapes and forms of distortion! With what simplicity and love it welcomes disorder and accepts disfigurement! How hard it is for the most conscientious parents to foresee all the unsuspected occasions when sickness and corruption can seep into a child's soul! Sometimes they themselves are the cause of what they would give their lives to prevent, by some word or a gesture or an action which perhaps because of some completely subjective context in the child's own mind,

something that utterly avoids detection and diagnosis, turns into a seed of one of the deadly sins.

It takes all the special understanding and sympathy of the love that only exists between parents and children, to even begin to protect a child against moral disfigurement; and, by the way, when I speak of moral disfigurement, I have in mind more than the one kind of sin. The godless think that all religious people are preoccupied, as they themselves are, with unchastity, as if there were no other disorders. And against all of them, is needed the watchfulness of a Father's and a Mother's special love. More than that, even the natural solicitude and sympathy of parents for their children is not strong enough or sure enough, without grace from God.

When I think of my own childhood, and of the love and conscientiousness of my Father, and his well-meaning desires to bring me up an intelligent and happy person: and when I think how completely impossible it was for him to succeed, under the circumstances in which he had placed himself and me, I cease to wonder at the wars and crimes that have filled this century with blood. Because of all the millions of children that have been born and have grown up in it, how few have reached maturity under the constant protection of religion and grace, and how many have grown like weeds on any dung they could find to put their roots in!

And now we are in a world where states pass laws to take children away from their parents, and put them through some kind of a fancy educational factory, training them not according to love and the natural, organic needs of a human conscience, but according to charts and mathematical averages and grandiose, abstract systems!

When will this murderous and conceited century wake up to its intellectual death, and to the immensity of its folly and corruption of heart? And when will the fools who sit in the ruins of the bombed universities, preaching the doctrines that will inevitably breed another war, when will they realize that they are cursed in their fascination for numbers, weights and measures, and that the world is damned in their idiotic pride?

Persons have been turned into dominoes, and the souls of individuals are annihilated into numbers and statistics. Children are no longer human beings, they have become factors in an economist's dream.

But their souls, nevertheless, go on existing and evolving, moving and changing and taking on ever stranger and more horrible shapes of corruption from the unnatural ferment in which they are left to stew, untrained, undirected, undisciplined, unnourished and undone.

How the world is cursed, and will be ever more and more accursed, in the abstractions and ideal systems of those who have subordinated all individual and concrete men, real souls, actual lives, to big, intangible entities of a purely moral or even logical order: states, social trends, or, worse still, some vast nebulous sort of Weltschmerz, calculated to devour all concretely existing things in the maw of its own melancholy perversity: like Nazism and most of the other political ideals that have come out of Germany in the last hundred and fifty years.

Even if all these systems were able to function according to the plans laid down for them—and they never are!—what little double-headed monsters would be produced by their institutions and their youth groups.

And when they fail, as Nazism has just failed, bringing down the walls and roofs of Europe on top of itself, what is left for the hundreds of thousands of orphans left to stray and fight for a living like little wolves in the jungle of bombarded tenements?

But why get into this digression? There is no need to go so far from home. What about the children that grow up, packed together in the frightful slums of the capitalistic world, born to contemplate, even from their cradle onward, scenes of prostitution, violence, and crime? Isn't this enough for a nation to have on its conscience, especially when many of the people who are responsible for it consider themselves pious men, and dare to kneel at the altar of God, and present Him the homage of their sacreligious prayers?

When I was eight years old, running loose among the rocks and prickly pears of Somerset Island, Bermuda, I was in just about the same position as the child of divorced parents. My father wanted to [take] care of me, but he did not precisely know how. I was without a family, without a school, without a church. I had no morals and no God. I would not even be able to say if there was such a thing as a church in the whole of Bermuda, if I had not gone back there

many years later, and noticed one then.³²

This time in Bermuda was, perhaps luckily, short. Tom was there only from October 1922 to early May 1923. He resumed his account, after the digression, with "Father left me in Bermuda with his friends," a short statement, without detail or interpretation or recrimination.³³ Owen Merton left Bermuda in March to arrange an exhibition of his paintings in New York. Relations among the adults seem to have been at a peak of cordiality at the time. Cyril Scott, whom Owen replaced or joined in Evelyn's bed, supported Owen in his efforts, got him some financial backing from the Garland-Hales, and wrote an introduction for the catalogue of the exhibition. Owen Merton and Evelyn Scott both gushingly told Lola Ridge of their love for one another. It may well be that Owen felt comfortable leaving Tom in Bermuda in Evelyn's care because he intended to marry her and make her Tom's stepmother. Tom, by his own account and others, had turned into a fractious, peevish, rebellious, mischievous, and cunning little boy. Owen wrote to Evelyn from New York: "I knew Tom was devilish."³⁴ Increasingly and implacably, it would appear, Tom Merton grew determined that he did not want his father to marry Evelyn Scott, and he did not want her to be his *stepmother*.

As the next years and months developed, young Thomas Merton, apparently without pudency or apology, remained adamant in his refusal to accept Evelyn Scott and in his determination to remain the central figure in his father's life. As Owen himself waffled, his son became more and more recalcitrant. The Scotts brought Tom with them when they returned to the United States in May 1923. Tom's father, as we have seen, had already returned to arrange his exhibition, and he had, that spring, been attempting to make enough money to enable him to return to France. He was engaged by Marie Garland-Hale to do some landscaping for her at the estate at Buzzard's Bay. He wrote to her in April: "If I don't get at least enough to have at least a year of hard painting after this present interruption—I shall not care what happens to me—I might as well take poison, but I cannot overcome the conviction that I am going to achieve all I wish, and soon."³⁵ Owen wanted nothing more than to be allowed to paint. Evelyn and her menage were not, at least at this point, an impediment to his painting except that no one in the group had any money. But, the attitude which we can sense in Tom was

rapidly becoming, not merely difficult, but inhibiting to his father's freedom of movement.

When the group returned from Bermuda they stayed for a time, at Owen's invitation, at the Jenkins home on Long Island. Owen wrote to Evelyn: "If you don't come up [from Bermuda] until say about May 12th—my mother in law & father in law and John Paul will all be in Detroit for a week from then on, and you can all stay here in perfect calm for that time. Then, I should say, get to New York or Flushing for a little time, & get off to France as quickly as we possibly can."³⁶ We can only guess at Tom's reaction to having the group (Cyril had by now picked up a "mistress") staying surreptitiously in his mother's former home while his grandparents and brother were away. Sometime in late May or early June, Owen took Tom with him to Massachusetts to Buzzard's Bay while he completed his landscaping assignment. The Scotts may have been there also. The estate was huge, and disparate types were always drifting through, from the Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran to the inventor of the Kewpie doll. There were always so many guests that the presence or absence of a few more occasioned little notice. In June, the menage, now squared, sailed for Europe, lugging Creighton along, but leaving Tom at Buzzard's Bay. The reasons for this are unclear, though Thomas Merton sheds some light on it. He may perhaps have become so difficult that his father, who desperately wanted to get to Europe to paint, decided to leave him rather than deal with the difficulty. It may even have been a punishment, since it would seem that Tom had, in the beginning, been included in the travel arrangements. Perhaps, observing the situation, Marie Garland-Hale, who liked Evelyn no better than Tom did, offered to care for the child until his father could send for him. Perhaps, since we know that the group was virtually penniless, there was no money to pay for Tom's passage, and he was merely left to be sent for at some future time. In any case, Tom found himself again among strangers, and, when he gives the reasons for which he thought he was left behind, he accepts it with the childlike aplomb with which, at least by the time he wrote *The Seven Storey Mountain*, he was accustomed to accepting his father's machinations. In another section deleted from the original draft, he describes something of his experiences in Buzzard's Bay and, in an amusing anecdote, the way in which, intentionally or not, he caused Mrs. Garland-Hale to send for his grandfather to come and take him away.

Once again, I am astonished at the equanimity with which I accepted not only this [his father's leaving for Europe], but also the fact that I was deposited, of all places, in the house of a very rich lady at Buzzard's Bay, in Massachusetts, somebody I had never seen before in my life, but who was related to someone Father had made friends with in Bermuda.

I suspect that Father was still thinking, in some way, of my education. Out of respect for him, and his talent, these people offered to take me in with them, and Father thought that it would be very good for me to be in such a good-mannered atmosphere: better, in fact, than if I returned to live with Pop and Bonnemaman, and my little brother John Paul.

His guess turned out to be very wrong. I was such a wild and noisy and thoroughly unpleasant little brat, that I was soon excluded from the dinner table and from the society of the lady of the house, and put with the Italian cook and the Negro maid and the other servants and I dare say I was a penance even to them. But there, of course, I had none of the advantages Father had imagined would be mine. What is more, the fact of being among strangers, and the feeling that I was unwanted and even disliked, intensified the growth of every bad tendency that had germinated in my soul.

I do not mean, by that, that I became vicious and revengeful and ugly in my temper, for I do not have very much of that in my nature. But being thrown back upon myself, and my own amoral world, I continued to develop and harden in my moral isolation, and in my almost total indifference to all standards of conscience. All I knew was that what I wanted was good, because I wanted it, and that what I did not want was evil because I did not want it. And my life consisted in getting the things I wanted, and avoiding the things I did not want: and the obstacles which other people put in my way were simply something to be got around with patience and resourcefulness.

The only comforting thing about all this is that my desires and repugnances were simple and natural in themselves. I wanted good things to eat. I tried to avoid going to school. I wanted to go swimming and fishing in the ponds in the cranberry bog. I wished I owned a tent and a canoe. It was when my desires, inflamed by the contemplation of the

pictures of various kinds of things that I liked, in a mail-order catalogue, began to grow to more ambitious dimensions, that I eventually got into trouble.

I found a check-book lying around the house and, without quite understanding the financial principles involved, wrote out a few handsome checks and sent them to the Montgomery Ward people, in Chicago, together with my order for all that I needed for a nice, happy summer in the woods.

I was then eight years old. As I remember it, what my conscience most reproached me for was the actual removal of the check itself from the check-book, and the use of this concrete piece of paper, belonging to someone else. I was not bothered about the thought of where the money would come from. I seem to have thought that it would simply be produced out of the air, in some way, on presentation of this powerful document, which my signature had made, in some way, my own.

Still, I don't want to seem to joke about this, because I realize that it was a mortal sin, and I had at least a vague general realization that it was very wrong, at the time. I certainly did not know what a mortal sin was, and I doubt that even the word sin was in my vocabulary. As for the Ten Commandments, I did not even know that there were Ten Commandments, until the appearance of a movie with that name. Yet the natural law was there, ingrained and promulgated in my soul by my very life and existence themselves, and my conscience could not leave me in any doubt.

Two good things came of it. The first was that the fright I got when they told me I was lucky not to go to a reform school, and which cured me of all such dishonesty for the rest of my life: and the second was that the good people who had taken me in, wrote to my Grandfather to come and fetch me away. This meant that I went back where I belonged, into my own family, my own home, with Pop and Bonnemaman and my brother, where I was loved, and where I loved in return, and where, even though I was a bit spoiled, and remained more or less an evil and ill-behaved child, there was nevertheless this love to provide a motive and standard for good actions, to furnish the proper conditions

for some kind of morality to develop, according to normal and fundamental needs of human nature.

That is the thing that the modern world seems to have forgotten about family life. The mere fact of spontaneous, natural affection between parents and children, and children among themselves, is something which liberates and nourishes the springs of moral and virtuous activity, and allows certain virtues to grow up almost instinctively, and without special effort on anybody's part, in the souls of children. Where, I ask you, would you find this natural charity, and piety, and obedience, and mutual patience and kindness and so on, growing up in those governmental incubators planned by our modern sociologists? And yet wherever there is any kind of a normal family life, these things will come as a matter of course: and even sometimes when the family life is not normal, where it is perverted and ruined by drunkenness or infidelity or violence, these virtues will grow up anyway, in the teeth of all opposition.

It was a happy day, then, when Pop arrived in Buzzard's Bay, with his derby hat and his black moustache and his nervous gestures and his noisy affability, which was somewhat subdued by the magnificence of the place where I had been living: for it was a huge house, in the middle of a great estate. But he took me away, and we went immediately to Boston, for no special reason, but simply for pleasure's sake, and he took me to Bunker Hill, and showed me the Bunker Hill monument, and I suppose we also saw a number of other things, for Pop was an insatiable sight-seer. After that we sailed for New York on the Night Boat, and as the late summer dusk was deepening into night, and we passed through the Cape Cod canal, I had a last opportunity to behold, at close range, the drawbridge over which I had once passed, on the way to Provincetown, and a small country store where, more recently, I had tried to palm off one of those bad checks.³⁷

Tom was back in Douglaston with his grandparents and brother, but, as has been pointed out, he missed his father. He recorded in his journal on 24 January 1966: "I realized today after Mass what a desperate, despairing childhood I had around the ages of seven—nine—ten, when Mother was dead and Father was in

France and Algeria."³⁸ He longed for his father to come and take him away with him again, minus, we may assume, Evelyn Scott. It was to be two years, however, before his father came back for him, two years in which, according to the son, Owen Merton did some of his best painting. The elder Merton also grew steadily guilty about leaving Tom behind and abandoning his responsibility to him; and, if we accept the accounts, his relationship with Evelyn Scott foundered largely due to the issue of Tom. Thomas Merton, even on Long Island, drove a wedge between his father and Evelyn, a wedge that inexorably split them apart.

The group—Owen, Evelyn, Cyril, his new mistress Ellen, and Creighton—left France in October 1923 and spent the next months, until April 1924, in Bou Saada, Algeria. They returned to France in May. Evelyn and Owen remained together for a time while Cyril went on to Paris and to a new mistress. Creighton was shuttled back and forth, often left, as Tom had been, with "friends." He recorded: "Domestic arrangements were so vague that frequently my mother believed I was with my father, when my father thought I was with my mother."³⁹

Back on Long Island, it was precisely these domestic arrangements that were causing Sam and Martha Jenkins no little anxiety, especially since Sam saw himself as partially funding these scandalous goings-on. One may well imagine that Tom lost no time in playing his part in increasing that anxiety. Evelyn complained in 1925 that Owen's "talking of me to and through the Jenkins [*sic*] is as if I were a whore."⁴⁰ They had been anxious for some time, and Owen, in his typically fumbling way, had consistently found it difficult to be honest with his in-laws. It is small wonder that Evelyn grew impatient with his equivocation which left her, vis-a-vis the Jenkins family, in an awkward and compromised position; small wonder that she came to find him weak and spineless. A letter he wrote to Evelyn after his return from Bermuda in the spring of 1923 demonstrates his tactics.

I must tell you the lies I tell my mother-in-law—which are the worst I do so far.

This lying business is the limit. It denotes a certain hardness in me that you wouldn't think I had. I feel so brutally unscrupulous, and as if I could do anything I chose if I am hard enough over it.

Soon after I got home my mother in law said—apropos of

a letter from my own mother which she had read by accident—"You know if you ever want to marry again—how glad I shall be." She said people say to her "Don't you dread it, if he ever wants to marry again." She says "No."

So then I say that same formula, that painting is the only thing I want to do, that it takes all I have—and satisfies me—and I have no time to think of anything else. You ought to kill me for saying this, but the time has not come for anything else. The best of it is, that my mother in law then says "I saw as soon as you came in the house that you had been all right" which means not sleeping with anyone. The funny thing is that I have the cleanest feeling over the lie—because being regenerated I feel lifted above lies by a kind of clean feeling and can smile at her with a genuine affection (which confirms everything she wants to believe about me) while I am actually lying to her. Please be mad with me, but I have no spare energy, for great rows now. I shall let her find out when we get to France, how things stand, but till she directly asks me I am not going to tell her. It will mean the children set against me and everything dished up. She told me that everything they had was for me and the children—we will need this money someday. Oh Hell, it is all showing me all the more need to get to France, where we can lead a perpetual life of no lies at all, instead of this half life on the objective side, where there is no real truth at all. I can get right inside myself any time I choose now, and feel absolutely clean & clear seeing & good enough for you.

Evelyn darling please love me more & more. Give me hell if you like in letters—only I will be better pleased if you don't have to. I can't stand this kind of lying—except in so far as I regard it as something totally outside myself. *You* understand. Do go on understanding. Evelyn I love you.⁴¹

Owen continued to find it difficult to confront his in-laws. By late 1924, we can sense though that the affair was going to have to reach some resolution, whether normalized by marriage or finalized by break-up. Yet, we can also sense that Owen continued to want to have everything as he wanted it (not unlike his son's description of his attitude at the time)—to paint, to have money to paint and to live, to live with Evelyn, to have Tom with him. Evelyn wrote to Lola Ridge in October:

Yes, darling, I love *you* for writing me that Esta [Nichols] thinks Owen loves me. And he does, darling, but it is all very queer and messed up and maybe ruined love, if you will accept that, for what Owen has been through about Tom is as genuine as about me. Tom is a morbid and possessive kid and Owen is made morbid about Tom through various things that occurred in connection with Ruth. Tom is and will be until he is big enough to be set adrift a constant obstacle to piece [*sic*] of mind.⁴²

The end of the affair was wrenching, drawn-out, and stormy. Misunderstanding developed on both sides. Both tried in their letters not to blame the other, although the letters are full of implicit reproaches. Owen, seemingly, tried to end the affair gradually, and, rather than making it easier, made it stunningly harder, convincing Evelyn that he was unbalanced. Since she could never quite blame Owen entirely, she placed much of the blame for the relationship's collapse on Tom, a nine year old child. Owen decided to return to the United States in the summer of 1925 to make one last ditch effort to salvage the relationship by reconciling Tom and his in-laws to a possible marriage. He also intended to take Tom back to Europe where he could supervise him more directly.

Owen Merton arrived at Douglaston unexpectedly in July 1925. Tom, with childish reserve, was both happy and cautious. His father looked and seemed different to him, and he was wary over his intent.⁴³ Owen had not been well. Chronic poverty and habitual misunderstanding with Evelyn had gnawed at him. He seemed to have some dimming hope that he could continue to live with Evelyn, have Tom with him, and receive some money from Sam Jenkins. But, this time, it was not just Tom who opposed the arrangement. There was "a bitter and angry dispute between Owen and Sam Jenkins, with Harold Jenkins now taking a strong part against Owen."⁴⁴ In Owen's state of impoverishment, he could not very well have married Evelyn and supported her and his sons. Sam Jenkins refused any longer to underwrite any arrangement which included Evelyn. She later wrote: "If Tom is to live with him, he and I, living together, would need to marry at once. If we married at once there would be no help whatever either from Jenkins or people here."⁴⁵ In the discussions, there seems to have been no question that John Paul would not accompany his father

in any case.

Whatever Owen Merton's answer to his in-laws may have been, he decided to return to Europe with Tom. He wrote to his teacher and mentor, Percyval Tudor-Hart: "I am coming back with my eldest boy Tom leaving on the 22nd August. It is a very difficult problem to know what to do about a boy but I know that no matter how risky a proceeding it seems that it is the only course open to me."⁴⁶ He saw Evelyn in London and informed her of his decision to devote his energies to Tom. There are indications that Owen, with his usual lack of awareness, took Tom with him to the meeting. If the portrayal in *Eva Gay* is even partially accurate, though there is no child present in the novel, it must have been a shattering and unforgettable scene.

Owen had decided, not only to give Evelyn up, but to forego the chance to work again with Tudor-Hart, thus compromising his formulated desire to put painting before everything else. He wrote to Tudor-Hart:

I have just got your letter, and your so spontaneous invitation to come and work pleases me very much indeed—I only wish it were possible for me to move about as freely as I would like. I have thought about it all very carefully since your letter came today and I only know that I feel I must not make any plans to move away until this boy is very much more acclimated & at home in the French language than he is at present. You see, in many ways, I owe the children a good deal more than I have ever been able to do for them. When I brought Tom over I was determined I would make up for all I had never been able to do in our very trying life in New York and I do feel that for his first six months in France that I must stick by him very closely. We are near Toulouse, and he is at school but living with me, and he depends on me very much. Later I shall be able to leave him for a month or six weeks, but I do honestly feel that I cannot at present.

Please, please don't think this ungracious in any way, if there was ever a time in my life when I should have valued the opportunity to work with you, it is now, but if I am making a symbol of making up to the child for two years absence from him, I cannot help it. I feel I must do it. . . .⁴⁷

Father and son returned to the South of France to a town called St. Antonin. In the winter Owen wrote to Evelyn: "Tom is good about understanding he has to look after himself. He always cries now when he gets the importance of something I lecture him about. I do believe he has got it this time."⁴⁸ Evelyn had, in the meantime, and true to form, taken up with another man, writer John Metcalfe. She signed herself "Mrs. John Metcalfe" as early as January 1926, but did not marry him until later, maybe in 1928, after Cyril Scott, for unknown and unnecessary reasons, obtained a Mexican "divorce," maybe in a mock ceremony in New Mexico in 1930. As Mrs. Metcalfe she told Lola Ridge in January: "Owen and I separated permanently in September. Little Tom *hated* me. What was there to do."⁴⁹ To the end she placed the blame on Tom. Even though she spoke of permanent separation, she continued to write, and to needle, Owen for at least another year. And he continued to respond. He wrote to Ridge in August:

Can I ever explain to you something of all this terrible catastrophe. Happily, I think I can write now, because yesterday I heard from Evelyn for the first time for eleven months. If there were a God as just as that child Evelyn is I could believe in him. If I could talk to you I could explain so much that appears incomprehensible. Lola I feel old—me that thought I would never get old. I think I've been through everything in this last 11 months—and if Evelyn were not happy with that good & fine man as I know him to be everything would be smashed for me. . . .

Lola dear will you believe my own word on the Gospel that I know I could not have reconciled the children & the question of either living with or marrying Evelyn. Tom's jealousy and irreconcilableness are perfectly enormous. There was no choice except to leave the children altogether—and then every night for the rest of my life would have been hideous with repentance. Only I see now that for the last eighteen months I was with Evelyn I was in a violently hysterical condition, perhaps controlling it made it more violent. Anyway when I got to New York I saw I could never handle the situation. Dear Lola it would have taken two months of the most careful tact, to handle the question with Jenkins. I had failed a month before in London to keep up Evelyn's courage over the situation which I was quite

certain till then that I could manage, given time—and I just busted. . . .⁵⁰

In September Evelyn suggested that she and John Metcalfe visit Owen and Tom at St. Antonin. Owen rejected the suggestion and told her: "I do think it will be much best if I don't see you and John for a long time. I only want everything now to be very fine & beautiful & though I know I would be decent & nice—and happy—yet I think I had better stay quietly by myself for a long time—perhaps a year." In a poignant coda to the entire menage period, he adds: "Give Jig my love—bless the kid—you don't know how much more he is like my kid in a way than Tom."⁵¹

By the autumn of 1926, Tom was in school, and Owen, though he averred that he would continue to love Evelyn, seems to have reconciled the situation. He told Evelyn: "I can accept what is, and I give you my love nicely like a nice boy." He remained a "child" to her to the end, and he dutifully signed himself "Mutt." He concludes the letter with his last report to Evelyn on Tom, a report which brings to conclusion the period of the Bermuda menage but which indicates that all tension had not been resolved:

Tom has now settled down, & is a plucky kid. And I am very happy about that too, because it *was* the show down. It came on him all of a heat when he got away from me, that I was pretty good to him, & that he didn't take the least interest in helping to keep things going. I mean sympathetically. Now all that's changed. It is a funny story. He is exactly like his mother in most ways, which means I am a bloody fool to him, except when my bloody foolishness is thought interesting by authority, then I must be wonderful. Could tell you a lot, but no time.⁵²

Years later in the hills of Kentucky Thomas Merton ranged backward through his experience and reached some conclusions about the period of the Bermuda menage, about how much it meant when his father came back and took him to France. He felt "It really saved me."⁵³ Perhaps in many ways it did save Merton, and we know that he continued throughout his life to look back to his "lost childhood" for answers to how it may have saved him. I

remain intrigued by what he chose to tell us about his reflections and what he chose not to tell us. Why do we get so few details? Why does he never mention Evelyn Scott by name? Why do we never know that he might have had a stepmother or that he played a role in preventing his father's remarriage? Why does his father emerge in the pages of *The Seven Storey Mountain* as a different person than he does in other sources?⁵⁴ These are, to my mind, interesting questions, and there are no easy answers to them.

Primarily, I would suggest that the pain of those years remained so great that he could not confront certain aspects of them. In other cases (notably with his guardian's widow, Iris Weiss Bennett), he attempted to reconcile and assuage old wounds by re-establishing contact but ended by finding the effort less than assuasive. When Creighton Scott attempted to communicate with Merton in the 1960s, Merton ignored the overture and did not answer his letter.⁵⁵

It may well be true, too, that, as Merton saw his childhood, some facts may not have remained in his adult consciousness as particularly important, including the fact of Evelyn Scott herself. He may not have known exactly what *was* going on during the menage, at least in all its ramifications. Evelyn perceived Tom as a threat to her and to her relationship with Owen, but he may not have perceived her as the *only* threat to him and his relationship with his father. To put it another way, she may have been just one of many threatening people (and events) which he thought he saw in the period following his mother's death. Evelyn may not have loomed as large to him as he did to her.

I also suspect that Merton, having been a child at the time, remained ignorant of many of the facts surrounding the years of the Bermuda menage. We know he was unacquainted with some facts from other evidence. He did not know that his father left forty watercolors to Cyril Kay Scott when he died. He did not know that a considerable portion of his father's correspondence had survived and would be deposited in various special collections. He seems to have forgotten or dismissed the name of the Garland-Hales at Buzzard's Bay. He wanted to think that his father was a good painter and took great pains in *The Seven Storey Mountain* and elsewhere to tell us he thought so, but his father had failed to become "somebody," and I would hazard that, particularly in view of the fact that Evelyn Scott quickly became a forgotten novelist,

he was unaware that those "friends" in Bermuda were anybody. Certainly he seems to have been ignorant of the fact that his father and Evelyn knew people he was later to admire: William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Kay Boyle, and others. In short, Thomas Merton could never have guessed how many interstices in his life would be filled by other sources—in many cases sources he did not realize existed.

It is possible also that Merton had resolved within himself the conflicts of the Bermuda menage before he entered the Abbey of Gethsemani, or, at least, started himself on the road to resolution. After his conversion, in that period of uncertainty before he came to the Trappists in Kentucky, he was drawn back to Bermuda. The actual trip, in April 1939, seems to have been a spur-of-the-moment type of trip, but there are indications that Bermuda may have been calling to him for some time. His long-time friend Robert Lax has described the return to Bermuda as a "David Copperfield sort of a trip," one on which he was "mining some of the darkest things in his own early life." He waxed enthusiastic about the island, writing to Lax that it was "splendid" and, significantly, comparing it with his birthplace in the South of France. Perhaps the return trip itself, in which he located churches and realized the island's beauty, was cathartic, a kind of re-birth in which he remembered the "poisons" but found no need to "stop and count" them. Michael Mott has suggested: "Merton's father had such a strong continuing influence on him precisely because his son felt there was something to forgive."⁵⁶ Maybe in the Bermuda of 1939, Thomas Merton began the process of forgiveness for the Bermuda menage of 1922-1923. Maybe it was there that he realized, in some continuing way, that his father had been good to him or, at least, tried to be good to him. Though some things may have continued to rankle, certainly by the time we reach the cut and edited version of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, he gives his father a full measure of forgiveness, a forgiveness which may have been the necessary antidote for the poisons of the Bermuda menage.

This is not to say that Merton purposely suppressed, as such, any information. He was far too honest and candid to have done that. I would instead say that one of the unique things about Thomas Merton is that he arranged, sorted, and selected facts in a way that made his "birthday theology" make sense to him. In several instances, he provides us with a digest (indeed a digestion)

of his thinking or conclusions about facts rather than the facts themselves. Clifton Fadiman pointed out that one thing which made *The Seven Storey Mountain* so unusual was that it dealt "not with what happens to a man, but what happens inside him."⁵⁷ Merton knew that awful things happened to him in Bermuda. While Creighton Scott chose to tell us some of the external and specific things which happened to Merton there, he chose to start from the fact of its awfulness and to extrapolate from that into a generalization on the awful things that happen to children. For him, the internal result overshadowed the external cause. We may not be responsible for what happens to us, but we are responsible for what happens inside us, for letting external causes lead us away from our true selves, away from the ground of our being.

As Merton reflected back on his childhood, though he recognized and groaned with the pain of it, he realized—and tried to communicate to us—that it was the fact of the unhappiness of his childhood, the fact that the child-ness of his childhood had been destroyed, which had started him on the long and arduous journey to recover, not so much that lost childhood, as his true self. In his birthday theology, the things that happen to us, if we brood on them and let them, can lead us further and further away from our true selves and from God. The journey away from ourselves and God begins in childhood—for Thomas Merton, specifically, in the Bermuda menage. Only by recovering the child-ness within ourselves, he seems to tell us, a child-ness purged of all poisons, can we start the journey back.

Birth is question and revelation.
The ground of birth is paradise
Yet we are born a thousand miles
Away from our home.
Paradise weeps in us
And we wander further away.
This is the theology
Of our birthdays.

NOTES

¹Thomas Merton, *Day of a Stranger*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith / Peregrine Smith, 1981), 43.

²"Louisville Airport / May 5, 1966" in *Eighteen Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1985).

³Anthony T. Padovano, *The Human Journey: Thomas Merton, Symbol of a Century* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1982), 81.

⁴Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), 181-82. Agnes Gertrude Stonehewer Merton (1889-1968), whom Merton called "Aunt Kit," was the second of Owen Merton's four sisters and the one with whom his son was later to correspond the most. See also "Letters to Family and Family Friends" in the forthcoming second volume of the Merton Correspondence, *The Road to Joy: The Letters of Thomas Merton to New and Old Friends*, selected and edited by Robert E. Daggy.

⁵Thomas Merton, *The Geography of Lograire* (New York: New Directions, 1969), 4-5.

⁶Thomas Merton to Father Placid, O.C.S.O., 5 April 1964, Thomas Merton Studies Center.

⁷Merton, *Conjectures*, 164.

⁸Merton, *Conjectures*, 167-70.

⁹Thomas Merton to Elsie Hauck Jenkins, 16 April 1965, Thomas Merton Studies Center.

¹⁰Thomas Merton to Gwynned Fanny Merton Trier, 8 September 1966, Thomas Merton Studies Center.

¹¹Thomas Merton to Gwynned Fanny Merton Trier, 20 December 1966, Thomas Merton Studies Center.

¹²"With the World in My Bloodstream" in *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977), 615, also included in *Eighteen Poems*.

¹³Merton, *Cables to the Ace* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 7.

¹⁴"Untitled Poem" in *Eighteen Poems*.

¹⁵Mary Jo Weaver, "An Honorable, Good Man?," *Merton Seasonal* 11 (Summer 1986): 12-13.

¹⁶Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), 13-17.

¹⁷The details of Creighton Scott's birth, as well as of Evelyn Scott's pregnancy, were given in *Escapade* (New York: Seltzer, 1923).

¹⁸D. A. Callard, "Pretty Good for a Woman": *The Enigmas of Evelyn Scott* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 68.

¹⁹Callard, *Enigmas*, 84.

²⁰Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard J. Haycraft, eds. *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1942), 1252-53.

²¹Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 23; Callard, 70-71.

²²Beatrice Katherine Merton (1891-), called by Merton "Aunt Ka,"

who, with her twin sister, Sybil Mary Merton Wreaks, were the youngest of Owen Merton's siblings.

²³Owen Merton to Evelyn Scott, 22 August 1922, in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

²⁴Callard, *Enigmas*, 21.

²⁵Callard, *Enigmas*, 84.

²⁶Owen Merton to Lola Ridge, 12 November 1922, Smith College.

²⁷Evelyn Scott to Lola Ridge, 18 July 1925, Smith College.

²⁸Evelyn Scott to Lola Ridge, 17 July 1925, Smith College.

²⁹See Evelyn Scott, *Eva Gay* (New York: Smith & Haas, 1933), passim.

³⁰Creighton Scott, *Confessions of an American Boy*, 7, unpublished manuscript in the possession of Mrs. Paula Scott.

³¹Creighton Scott, *Confessions*, 1-2.

³²Thomas Merton, original draft for *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 35-38. Two copies of this manuscript survive, one in the Library at Boston College and the other in the Sister Therese Lentfoehr Collection at the Merton Center, Columbia University. A microfilm copy is preserved in the Thomas Merton Studies Center. Portions of this section are quoted in Mott, 22.

³³Merton *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 19.

³⁴Owen Merton to Evelyn Scott, [April 1923], Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

³⁵Owen Merton to Marie Garland-Hale, [April 1923], Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

³⁶Owen Merton to Evelyn Scott, [April 1923], Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

³⁷Original draft of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, 39-42.

³⁸Mott, *Seven Mountains*, 25.

³⁹Creighton Scott, *Confessions*, 8.

⁴⁰Evelyn Scott to Lola Ridge, [1925], Smith College.

⁴¹Owen Merton to Evelyn Scott, [April 1923], Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁴²Evelyn Scott to Lola Ridge, October 1924, Smith College; see also Mott, *Seven Mountains*, 24.

⁴³Mott, *Seven Mountains*, 26.

⁴⁴Mott, *Seven Mountains*, 26.

⁴⁵Evelyn Scott to Lola Ridge, 18 September 1925, Smith College. The phrase "People here" presumably referred to Cyril Scott, whose patience with Evelyn was near exhaustion.

⁴⁶Owen Merton to Percyval Tudor-Hart, Ashuelot, New Hampshire, 15 August 1925, Richard Bassett Archives.

⁴⁷Owen Merton to Percyval Tudor-Hart, [Autumn 1925], Richard Bassett Archives.

⁴⁸Owen Merton to Evelyn Scott, [Winter 1926], Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁴⁹Evelyn Scott to Lola Ridge, Isles of Scilly, Cornwall, England, 15 January 1926, Smith College.

⁵⁰Owen Merton to Lola Ridge, Garonne, France, 24 August 1926, Smith College.

⁵¹Owen Merton to Evelyn Scott, 6 September 1926, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁵²Owen Merton to Evelyn Scott, 19 October 1926, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁵³Mott, *Seven Mountains*, 25.

⁵⁴On this point, see D. A. Callard, "Father of the Man: An Investigation into the Roots of Thomas Merton," *Merton Seasonal* 11 (Summer 1986): 5-9 and Robert E. Daggy, "'A Great Soul': Owen Merton / May 14, 1887-January 18, 1931," *Merton Seasonal* 11 (Summer 1986): 2-4.

⁵⁵Brother Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O., onetime secretary to Thomas Merton at the Abbey of Gethsemani, in conversation.

⁵⁶Mott, *Seven Mountains*, 21-22.

⁵⁷*The Seven Storey Mountain*, 1948 jacket blurb.